

Noun modification and noun complementation in Northeast Asia

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Comrie (1996, 1998, 2010) and Matsumoto (1997) argue for the existence of a class of languages, including Japanese and Korean, where relative clauses (RCs) and clausal noun complements (NCs) have the same structure. The hallmarks of these “general noun-modifying clause constructions” (GNMCCs) are claimed to be surface similarity in the formal exponence of NCs and RCs, lack of evidence for extraction (“relativization”) in RCs, and the use of the GNMCC pattern in complex NPs with a very wide range of relations between the clausal constituent and the head noun. We show that even in Northeast Asian languages which are claimed to have GNMCCs in Comrie, Matsumoto, and Sells (forthcoming), these properties do not hold together. In Japanese, Korean, Ainu, Tundra Nenets, Turkic, and Sakha NCs and RCs are clearly distinguished by phenomena such agreement and/or N’ Ellipsis. To the extent that these have been carefully investigated, the alleged GNMCC languages also exhibit island phenomena. We conclude that GNMCCs do not form a coherent typology. Our particular focus in this paper is to show that NCs and RCs are structurally distinct, even in languages that have been claimed to exhibit GNMCCs.

References

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